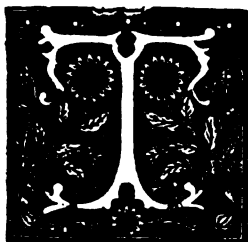


## WAYNE HOUSE.

BY ELIZABETH PHIPPS TRAIN.



HE tale I am about to relate concerns a part of my life that I remember with the shuddering horror which possesses us when we recall and re-experience, in memory, a terrible soul-haunting dream.

My husband was many years my senior—already a middle-aged man when we were married—but so tender and tolerant of my whims and caprices, so ready to sympathize in all my youthful follies, that I never felt the difference in our age as a barrier in my pleasure; and, in my sorrows, surely it was a rock of strength against which my weak childish heart could lean in security.

We lived in a thriving manufacturing town, where my husband had established already a large and exceedingly remunerative practice; so that, at the time of our marriage, he was able to surround me with a considerable degree of luxury. Our home was beautiful, and, as the years passed on, and three lovely children came to grace it, I grew almost arrogant in my pride and happiness.

One afternoon, I had returned from paying a round of visits, when my head-nurse came to me. "Mrs. Carteret," she said, in a grave tone, "would you be pleased to step up to the nursery and look at Master Harold? He don't seem quite himself, and I feel kind of worried about him."

I remember that I was singing the conclusion of an air I had caught from a street-organ when she addressed me, and I finished it gayly as I preceded her to the nursery, even repeating the refrain as I entered the room—so careless was I of any danger that could threaten my darlings. They were all grouped together in the further end of the large apartment, and, near the window, sat the young under-nurse in her white cap and apron, sewing. I can see the picture vividly, even now. It is not strange. It was the last time my eyes ever gazed upon the world through that glamor of perfect unalloyed bliss that had so long veiled them from all trouble.

Harold, the eldest, was lying on the floor; his

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curly head supported by a pillow; his eyes half closed, and his manner quite listless and unlike its usual buoyancy. By his side stood Rob, his babyish features dignified and absurdly matured by the addition of nurse's spectacles, peering gravely into his brother's languid face, and giving wise and careful directions, in a childish counterfeit of his father's tone, to little Marjorie, my three-year-old daughter, who, with sweet young eyes, half laughing, half serious, looked, in partial comprehension of the nature of the game, from one to the other of her brothers.

I saw at a glance that something serious ailed my boy, and had him carried to my own chamber, apart from the other children, and there put to bed. It needed, however, the grave startled look in my husband's eyes, as they rested upon his oldest son, to awake my apprehensions.

After giving some directions, minute and impressive, to nurse, he beckoned me to a farther window, took me tenderly in his arms, and gazed pityingly into my face.

"Love," he said, "do you know what the lad's illness is?"

"No," I replied, fighting against my vague foreboding. "A heavy cold and fever—nothing more, is it, Paul? Tell me it is nothing else."

He shook his head and was about to speak, when suddenly there came a soft rushing sound, which I knew well—the pattering of small feet—and, forgetful of all else in my usual fear lest the swift-coming heedless little legs should trip over the few low steps that separated my dressing-room from my chamber, I called aloud, warningly, as was my custom:

"Take care! take care!" Instantly, and before my husband could hush my voice, I repented the words, for they had reached and disturbed the wandering brain of my boy. Raising himself in bed, he turned in my direction, and cried in a hoarse muffled voice, horribly unlike his usual clear tones:

"Don't worry, mother dear. We're not coming—we're going out."

Let me not linger over this sad preface. It is enough to say that the relentless Azrael had, under the guise of diphtheria, entered our happy home, and, not contenting himself with one victim, had known no satiety until he had destroyed our entire flock.

My grief was thoroughly selfish and morbid; I lost all interest in the affairs of life; grew irritable and so intensely nervous that the slightest unusual sound seemed a disturbance greater than I could bear. I caused the nursery to be closed, and everything pertaining to my little ones to be disposed of by others. I grew to hate the house and neighborhood, so associated was it with my children's presence. Of my husband's equal sorrow, so nobly and undemonstratively borne, I was utterly inconsiderate, and his life, at that time, could have been little short of martyrdom. Finally, at the end of his resources, he proposed that we should go abroad; and, as I gladly seized upon any plan that should relieve me of painful associations, he arranged that a professional friend should assume his practice, and for a year we sought distraction in constant motion. Alas! it was only distraction—not healing; and, when we found ourselves upon the steamer that was to carry us home, the enforced idleness brought a renewal of bitter memories, and my husband recognized that his attempt had failed.

Yet one good effect our journey had produced—it had opened my eyes to the selfishness of my grief and had awakened me to a recognition of the sad havoc silent sorrow had wrought in my husband.

I never shall forget the night we passed in New York, prior to the day fixed for our home-going. Its agony grew so unendurable, that I felt a need for some physical exertion that might relieve the mental pressure. I arose softly, donned my clothes and outer garments, and laid my hand upon the door-handle, to open it quietly. Unhappily, it creaked in turning, and, with a start, my husband awoke and discovered my absence. With a stride, he reached me, and grasped my arm.

"Louise," he cried, with a great fear in his voice, "where are you going?"

I suffered him to lead me back into the room, and, as I sank inertly into a chair, I burst into an hysterical fit of weeping.

"Paul! Paul!" I cried, "it is useless—I cannot go back there! Oh, God! what shall I do?"

He knelt beside me and gathered me into his strong arms, stroking my head soothingly, as it lay on his breast, with his large comfortable hand.

"What is it, love?" he asked, gently, as one would coax a child. "You cannot go back to our home?"

"Home! The word is a mockery. There is none for us! Oh, my children! my babies!

Paul, I want them so; I cannot live without them."

"Louise, would it be a relief to you never again to go back to Elsboro? Shall we make a new home for ourselves in a new place? We can do so, my darling; you are young yet, and I am strong enough to begin again."

"Paul, love, do you mean it? Could we do it?" I cried.

"Certainly," he assented. Then compunction smote me.

"But your practice," I exclaimed: "your splendid practice! You could not abandon that!"

"Easily, dearest," he replied. "All the men, women, and children in Elsboro are but shadows compared with my wife. For her happiness, I would willingly make a holocaust of the whole lot."

So it was settled.

My husband proposed that, in order to give our new life a complete alteration from the old existence, we should shun towns and establish ourselves on the outskirts of some city, where, if patients sought him, he could attend them. This he accordingly did, and were soon settled in a rather lonely but beautifully rural neighborhood.

We had discovered a house which charmed us, both from its quaintness and the air of antiquity—an unusual property in our new land—which hung about it. It bore a certain neglected appearance, which we easily caused to be remedied, and was attractive to us for the very reason that made it unwelcome to others: namely, its old-fashioned build, which was so unlike our late modern dwelling and the modish Queen-Anne mansions that were so rapidly springing into surprising and marvelously decorated shapes all about us. It was a rambling wooden structure, built of solid beams and massive timbers, approached by a double stoop, and surrounded with gardens diversified by overgrown, weed-encumbered, box-bordered paths. The interior of Wayne House—as it was called, from the name of the family who had built and long occupied it—was a series of inconvenient surprises, and there was only one point of resemblance in its whole structure to the once loved house in which I had spent so many happy years: this was in the situation of the room Paul and I had selected for our chamber. It was connected, as was my former bed-room, with a dressing-room which was reached by descending three steps; the same short flight on the opposite side had, in our other house, led into a passage to my children's

nursery: here, it gave access to a small dark closet, from which a queer long-disused—and, I should have supposed, useless—flight of steps led down into some remote region, which, for a long time, we did not investigate. The closet we kept locked, giving the little room but one outlet—that through our chamber.

The employment of arranging our Lares and Penates in this abode so occupied me, mind and body, that, on its completion, I felt so much more like my old self, that I regarded the place as a means of salvation, and already felt a love for its quaint picturesque ugliness spring up within me. It was a great joy to me also to note the pleasure with which my husband regarded my altered demeanor, and the beneficent effect of healthy employment had given me strength to subdue, in a measure, the hysterical melancholy which had so long dominated me.

We had entered our new home in the spring, and by the autumn had become quite rooted in our transplantation. My husband's reputation had preceded him, and the hope that I had indulged of having him more constantly with me was frustrated by the many demands made upon his skill. I should have felt a regret that we had moved so far from the city—as his absences were thus more prolonged—had it not been for the promise of a tender and ardently longed-for companionship which, ere another spring should bud, was to be granted me.

I was sitting over my needlework one beautiful afternoon in late September. I had sewed steadily all day, and was a little weary and drowsy in consequence. Indeed, I had lost myself once or twice in dreamland, which was, as ever, peopled by my lost darlings, when suddenly there came to my ears a soft, familiar, but long-unheard sound—the swift oncoming of small childish feet. Still half under the spell of my dreams, I started up and cried warningly:

"Take care, dear ones! Take care!"

The sound instantly ceased, even as my words awoke me to full consciousness, and for a few moments I succumbed to a fierce attack of my old grief. Determined that my husband should not discover its traces, I resolutely washed them away and went for a long walk in the garden, which proved so effectual a remedy that he failed to find anything amiss on his return. Not so easily, however, could I rid myself of the cause of my overthrow. That peculiar pattering rush of hurrying steps haunted me. So vivid and real had it been, that I could not believe it the imaginative re-creation of a dream; and yet, well I knew

that such it must have been. I tried to put its memory from me, and had well-nigh succeeded, when, early one morning, before we had risen, I heard it again. I had just waked and my husband was yet sleeping, when, from the direction of my dressing-room, came that unmistakable sound. In the half-dazed condition that follows close upon long deep slumber—the past was the present, intervening months had rolled away, and my children, as was their wont, were rushing heedlessly from the nursery in a merry rivalry as to which should first reach mamma's bed.

"Take care! Take care, little ones!" I cried. My words at once roused my husband.

"What is it, Louise?" he asked. He looked at me in surprise. "What ails you, dear? You are pale as death and trembling like a leaf. To whom were you talking, love?"

"To our children, Paul. Did you not hear them coming from the nursery? Hark!" I laid my hand on his arm to enforce silence, but alas! the sound had died away, and, nervously excited, I rose and opened the door leading to the small dressing-room.

I was not surprised to find it tenantless. I expected nothing else; but, as I stood on the topmost step, peering into the blankness, was it fancy or reality that made me think I heard a gentle pitiful sobbing near by? I said nothing of this, knowing, by his manner, that my husband was becoming alarmed at what he considered my vagary, and, for a time, was enabled to quiet my quivering nerves; but an incident that happened not long after made him, if not share my superstition, at least sympathize with its cause.

We had come in from a beautiful country drive about six o'clock, one afternoon, and had gone to our chamber to make some alteration in our toilets for the evening. As we entered the room together, something—perhaps the gentle flame of the wood-fire on the hearth—reminded me forcibly of my children. I shivered and glanced at Paul. He was standing by the mantel, looking sadly into the crackling fire, and I saw that the same memory had occurred to him: a recollection of the custom which used to prevail with us, when three little white-clad figures would rush jubilantly into our room, at this hour, to say their prayers at papa's knee, and scorch their pink toes by the ardent blaze.

The quick tears sprang to my eyes, but, before they could fall, I noticed my husband give a violent start, and at the same instant came that strange weird sound. So natural did it seem at

this hour, and so absorbed had I been in reflections of the past, that I did not pause to consider our changed circumstances, but again called involuntarily as so often before: "Take care, sweethearts, take care!" For the first time in my life, I saw my husband unnerved. Sinking into a chair that stood close beside him, he covered his face with his hands, and his strong frame shook with uncontrollable emotion. Then it was that I learned how deep and unemonstrative his sorrow had been. Allowed no vent, it had grooved fierce channels in his soul, which time and hope had not—as in my case—bridged with new anticipations.

The next day, he returned earlier than usual from his visits, bringing with him a carpenter. Intuitively I understood his purpose in fetching him hither, and accompanied them upstairs to our dressing-room. The closet door, of which I have spoken, my husband unlocked, and the man made a thorough investigation as to its construction.

"I see no loose boards or cracks here, Dr. Carteret," he said, at last. "Will you describe the noise again?"

Paul glanced at me apprehensively. I divined that he forbore putting its significance into words that should distress me, and was turning away when—patter, patter, patter, came a sound as of eager little feet approaching in ardent impetuous haste. I started forward. "Take care—" I began, but did not finish the caution, for my husband's touch again awoke me to the futility of my words. Still holding me closely, he turned to the man, and, with great beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, said hurriedly:

"I need not describe the sound: you have heard it. Discover where it is."

The fellow, who appeared to be of more than ordinary intelligence, looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Beg pardon, sir; I have heard nothing."

My husband let his arm drop from about me.

"Heard nothing?" he repeated. "Did you not hear a sound like—like—the hurrying steps of little children?"

The man shook his head.

"Not I, sir."

Paul gazed at him, with a strange suspicion dawning in his eyes.

"Gooding, you stood between my wife and me. You heard her speak, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, did you not hear any sound, just before?"

"Nothing, sir."

My husband put his hand to his forehead with a gesture of despair, then he moved closer to Gooding and laid it heavily upon his shoulder.

"Think again, my good fellow," he said, urgently, almost persuasively. "You must have heard some sound, else you would have wondered that Mrs. Carteret should speak as she did."

"I didn't notice what the lady said, sir, thinking she was speaking to you; but I'm certain I heard no noise."

Paul drew a long breath, and tried to turn the subject by alluding to the staircase to which the closet gave access, and soon he and the carpenter were discussing its probable outlet. I was completely upset by the continued repetition of that inexplicable mystery, and, throwing a shawl about me, descended to the garden, to try and regain, in the pure fresh air, the self-control which I felt slipping from me. But, try as I would, my thoughts lingered about the subject, and that suggestion of a new and horrible idea, which I had read in Paul's eyes as the man disclaimed all comprehension of our agitation, recurred to my tortured mind. Was it possible that he feared that our brains had become touched by trouble? I had read a shadow of the expression before, when I knew that he feared for my sanity: but, from the fact of our being the only listeners to that haunting and constantly recurring sound, did he argue that grief had affected us both?

As I strolled up and down, I was arrested, when near the garden-gate, by the sight of an uncouth figure leaning on the rustic bars. The man gazed at me with sombre mournful eyes. He was miserably clad in ancient and shrunken garments, and his whole appearance was wretchedly poor and unkempt. Straggling locks of yellowish-gray hair fell about his lean and pallid face; and, as he attempted to address me, his utterance was broken by a hollow and racking cough.

"Madam," he said, raising his rusty felt hat with a graceful though tremulous courtesy, "are you the present owner of Wayne House?"

"My husband bought it about six months ago," I replied.

"I am addressing Mrs.—" he asked, suggestively.

"Mrs. Carteret," I supplied.

"Thank you. I am Philip Wayne. My fortunes, you see, are somewhat fallen since I owned the house."

I bowed my acknowledgment of his introduction; and, compassionating the ill-luck which had brought the former owner of the property to this low estate, I opened the gate and invited

his entrance, just as my husband issued from the house and approached us. I knew of Paul's great abhorrence and impatience of beggars, and had not time to prevent the words which, as I expected, he greeted me with.

"Louise dear," he exclaimed, as his eyes fell upon the tatterdemalion, "I would not admit beggars."

As he spoke, my protégé drew himself erect, and I shuddered at the fierce malignancy of the glance he shot, from beneath his overhanging yellowish-gray eyebrows, at Paul. I hastened to explain matters.

"Nay, Paul," I said; "this is a gentleman who formerly owned Wayne House. Mr. Wayne, allow me to introduce my husband."

Paul immediately held out his hand, in welcome to our unbidden guest. Like all great physicians, his heart was ever open to the appeals of real distress and misfortune, though intolerant of mendicancy; and, when he heard from the unfortunate creature's lips the causes which had brought about his present miserable condition, no prince in all his state could have received more courteous and sincere overtures of hospitality than did the forlorn wretch who had by his own telling been the buffet of fortune.

This was the tale he told us amid the shadows of the falling night, as we stood in the garden that had been his heritage:

"My grandfather was an Englishman, who, marrying an American, conceded to her homesick fancies to the extent of banishing himself to a strange and uncongenial country. Here he built this house and became a large land-owner, fashioning his life and that of his family on English models, among which, as you may naturally imagine, the law of primogeniture and entail held high rank. His will was drawn up in accordance with these principles, a further extension of which was rigidly enjoined upon his heir. Thus it was that, when my father, his only child, died, leaving two sons, Eugene, the elder, came in for everything, while to me, the unimportant Benjamin, was left a blessing and my mother's insignificant fortune.

"My brother was already forty years of age, and, as he had remained thus far unmarried, there was every probability that he would die a bachelor. He was liberal to me—exceedingly so: let me do him that justice—and I confess that, being rather gay, I made considerable demand upon his generosity. Money, to me, was utterly valueless save for momentary gratification, and, feeling quite sure of my inheritance, I recklessly squandered what I could coax from him, and made large drafts on future

probabilities. Without vanity, I may say that, being good-looking, witty, and popular, I found easy means of involving myself in debt.

"At last, I came to an end of my resources—credit failed and money-lenders looked shy at my security. I was meditating a clean confession of my liabilities to Eugene and an appeal to his mercy, when, one morning, a letter from him dashed my hopes to the ground. It announced his approaching marriage to a young and attractive girl, the daughter of his clergyman.

"I can recall, as if but an hour had intervened, the crushing effect of that blow. At last, I remembered my former plan. Why should I not carry it out even now? If I succeeded, it would at least be a temporary relief to my overwhelming embarrassments. By the next train, I was on my way hither. Before night, I had made a clean breast of my condition to Eugene; and, the next morning, I departed from Wayne House, with a check for fifty thousand dollars in my pocket and my brother's words ringing in my ears:

"Here is a free gift. On its income, you can live comfortably, if you choose to do so. I make, however, no conditions or suggestions as to its use: only remember that, having paid your debts twice and supported you entirely for ten years, it is the last cent I shall ever, under any circumstances, give you."

"Time passed; I paid part of my debts, dissipated the sum Eugene gave me, and acquired fresh liabilities. I seldom saw my brother, but heard from him at intervals. I knew that his wife had died, after presenting him with two children—a boy and girl—two living obstacles to my inheritance. By this time, I was miserably poor, my friends had deserted me, and ruin stared me in the face. I was beginning to see the fully of the life I had led, and to wish ardently for a chance to start afresh, when I received a telegram from my brother's steward, announcing that Eugene had been stricken with paralysis and desiring my immediate presence. I went to his bankers, and represented that I had not sufficient money to defray my traveling-expenses. This they supplied me, and, just about this hour in the evening, I entered that gate. I found that not only sickness, but death, had been before me, my brother's seizure having been occasioned by the sudden loss of his eldest child, a girl of six years.

"Eugene was very ill and unable to speak; but he recognized me, I think. The physicians gave slight encouragement as to his recovery,

and to me the whole household looked for directions. There never had been much love between my brother and myself, and, naturally, I felt little actual grief at his condition—but I never wished him dead."

The speaker's voice sank here, and I motioned to Paul to invite him into the house. This he did; but the old man seemed not to hear him: he sat motionless on the garden-seat upon which he had sunk at the beginning of his recital, and, with his dim far-away gaze fixed on the distant horizon, appeared quite oblivious of us, his auditors. We, deeply interested, said no more; and, presently, he resumed in a low muttering tone, quite unlike his former speech, and so indistinct that we had to hold our breath to catch it. Heretofore, he had certainly been speaking to us, now he apparently addressed himself:

"No, I never wished Eugene would die; I rather hoped he'd live, because it seemed to me that his heart would be softened by illness and that he might help me again, recognizing my devotion. But he did not—he died, and I was appointed administrator and guardian over property that ought to have been mine, and would have been but for an obstacle; and it became mine when the obstacle was—died. Did you speak, madam?"

His manner and tone changed as he asked the irrelevant question; he had shaken off the dreamy haze that seemed to obscure us from him, and, at my exclamation, was immediately alert and self-possessed.

"No," I answered; "I said nothing."

Neither had I. The sound that had disturbed him had been merely an audible involuntary shudder of distrust and repulsion evoked by the peculiar accent with which he spoke of "the obstacle." He seemed at a loss as to where he had left off, and my husband supplied the cue: "You mean the other child—the boy—died?"

The old man nodded and continued:

"I, of course, then inherited the property; but, from the moment of my taking possession, things went wrong. I did not care to live in such a quiet place, and went abroad, entrusting my affairs to an agent. I was absent five years, living luxuriously and getting all I could out of life. My dividends were paid regularly, with no abatement, and I congratulated myself on possessing a man so well qualified to manage and rid me of all care. Finally, I grew weary of travel, and decided to return to America. I notified my agent to expect me; but, when I reached New York, I found that he had absconded with every cent of my property which

he could realize. You may imagine the shock this was to me. Nothing remained but my real estate; little by little, I sold it, living upon the proceeds until it was all gone. Then again poverty stared me in the face, and this time there was no escaping it.

I have sunk, sunk, until you now behold me, once your equal—and, perhaps, superior—in wealth, debased to the level of a pauper. Have I tried to work? Aye, have I—but to no purpose. Bred in idleness and luxury, and debilitated by indulgence, I had no strength to work. Often have I sought to end my weary existence; but—God help me!—even for that I lack sufficient courage. I feel that death is upon me: all the length of my journey have I felt him pursuing me. But I have accomplished the end I had in view—to return once more to this house; not from love of its associations, but because I felt that I must visit it once more. Now my tale is ended. Will you grant me shelter?"

My husband hesitated—the first time I had ever known him backward in yielding to the claims of hospitality: still, I did not blame him. There was something eerie and repellant about the former master of Wayne House, that had developed with his story and made me feel that he was an undesirable guest. Still, a refusal would have been impossible under the circumstances, and Paul tried to make his welcome cordial. No half-measures were ever possible with him; and so, that night, Philip Wayne found himself ensconced in our best guest-chamber, comfortably fed and prescribed for, enjoying a luxury to which he had long been unaccustomed.

When we discussed our strange visitor, that evening, Paul acknowledged that the old man had diagnosed his own case correctly; his strength and vitality were spent, and he was rapidly nearing his end. For some days he lingered, and we did all in our power to alleviate his condition. He was very grateful, and seemed to become quite attached to me. I found employment for all my spare time in ministering to him, and was able to forget those weird, ghostly, and inexplicable sounds which had disturbed my tranquillity. There had been no recurrence of them since the day on which old Philip Wayne had been discovered at our gate, and my husband and I began to believe that, indeed, we had been laboring under a hallucination.

Our visitor had been with us about a week when, one afternoon, Paul, after making his usual professional visit to him, came to me and said gently:

"Louise dear, he seems very low; I should not wonder if he passed away in the night. I think I will have Kelly sit up with him." I assented; and it was arranged that our coachman should watch in an adjoining room, and be ready to call my husband in case of a change.

I was wakeful that night. At last I fell asleep, but my slumber was restless; I would doze and wake again repeatedly, until, after many unsuccessful attempts, I finally fell into a heavy unconsciousness. It must have been about two o'clock when a familiar sound waked me. I had been dreaming that my little ones were with me.

I fancied that it was early morning—too early, I thought, for nurse to allow them to rise; and, glancing at their still sleeping father, I quietly slid from the bed to prevent their awaking him. Noiselessly I stole through the gloom, beckoned by the night-lamp that always stood in the dressing-room. I reached the door in a moment, with my usual warning yet unspoken on my lips, when a sight met my eyes that paralyzed my utterance, save for a short sharp cry.

There before me, kneeling in front of the three steps leading to the closet, with his haggard countenance revealed by the faint rays of the lamp, was Philip Wayne, engaged in a most curious occupation. He was literally tearing the wood-work away with his long shriveled fingers. His back was to me, and so absorbed was he in his work that he failed to hear my cry. His ebbing strength must have flowed back in a superhuman tide, for he had already worked great havoc with the wooden steps. The carpet had been torn aside, and the debris that surrounded the bent and quivering figure showed that his energy had already accomplished much.

My husband, roused by the sharp sound of my voice, had stolen to my side, and together we watched in amazement the weird worker.

Finally there came a pause; we moved a step forward, the better to observe his movements.

All the planks had been removed, and now the man crouched low over something that we

could not perceive; then we saw the white hands stretched forth until they caught and clung to the invisible object. As we watched with bated breath, suddenly, upon the still night air, there came a terrible sound, half-shriek, half-moan, a convulsive movement of the crouching figure, and the next moment my husband was supporting the lifeless form of Philip Wayne.

I pressed forward; in the casing of the lowest step lay a little dress, still retaining its shape and texture, while about it were strewn some tiny white bones. I remember only this; the fainting-fit which followed ended in brain-fever, and when I recovered we had again become homeless.

Fearing lest painful associations should aggravate my malady, Paul had me carried at once to a hospital, and never again have I beheld or heard aught of Wayne House. A few explanations of that terrible scene were given me. Kelly acknowledged that, being unaccustomed to watching, he had fallen asleep.

Perfectly acquainted with the plan of the house, its former master had reached the dressing-room by means of the private staircase, which, investigation proved, led to the lower hall, into which issue was obtained by means of a small door that was scarcely discernible in its obscure position under the staircase. He had been able easily to enter the room, as, after the visit of the carpenter, Paul had neglected to relock the door. How the dying creature had managed to grope his way through the dark passage is a mystery we shall never comprehend—unless we believe that remorse for the terrible crime which he must have committed endowed him with supernatural strength, great enough to support him until he should satisfy the craving to revisit the scene of his guilt.

I am now a happy woman. Children again gather about our hearth-stone, and gladden our ears by the dearest of all titles; but never have I heard the quick patter of their tiny footsteps without a shudder, caused by a vivid recollection of the echoes of Wayne House.

## A SHORT STORY.

BY MAUDE S. PEASLEE.

A GLANCE or two  
From eyes so blue,  
A gentle pressure of my hand;  
A fragrant flower,  
A pleasant hour,  
A stroll along the sand.

A fairer face,  
A sweeter grace,  
Another hand is clasped;  
A kiss or two,  
A promise true—  
My dream of love is past.

## BARBARA MORELAND'S CHOICE.

BY FANNIE LOUISE WEAVER.



HOPE, Miss Barbara, you realize fully what you are throwing away. It would be a pity if you were to come to your senses too late," and John Hammond rose from his chair and walked nervously up and down the room.

He was a man of about fifty, of medium height and good figure. Judging from

the resolute cast of countenance, a thoughtful observer would say that he was a man to succeed in almost any undertaking by the power of his will, but that he would very likely miss the best kind of happiness that life affords, through lacking the gentler qualities of mind and heart. However correct such a judgment might be, it is very certain that the world looked upon John Hammond as an eminently successful man.

Never, perhaps, in his whole life had he felt so sure of success, as the day he went to ask Barbara Moreland to be his wife. By his own library-fire, he had deliberated long on the subject. It had been no hasty matter with him—that was not his way. He weighed carefully the pros and cons, and decided that, in view of all the circumstances, the result could not be otherwise than the one he wished.

The circumstances, briefly stated, were these: Barbara's father had died insolvent a year before, and Mr. Hammond held the mortgage on his fine house and elegant furniture. He had been Mr. Moreland's trusted friend for years, and had helped him out of financial straits over and over again. But it was all of no use; affairs became so hopelessly entangled that at last the poor man's brain yielded under the strain, and he gave up the struggle. John Hammond had been a frequent visitor at the house, and had watched the eldest daughter with silent admiration for some time. Mabel, three years younger, was considered the prettier of the two; but Barbara's attractiveness lay deeper than outward beauty.

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There was enough fine feeling in Mr. Hammond's composition for him to realize that, with Barbara's somewhat independent nature and romantic tendencies, the very fact that he held the family in his power might work against him. But whatever doubts came up in his mind were quickly dispelled by an interview with Mrs. Moreland, who received his proposal for her daughter's hand with unfeigned gratification and relief, adding to her own consent the assurance that she knew it would also have been her husband's wish.

To be sure, she said to herself, after he had gone—he was twentyfive years older than Barbara, and a widower, and girls sometimes had notions about "first love," and all that; but Barbara was really sensible, and would see, of course, what a splendid thing it would be for them all for her to marry him.

It was not strange, therefore, that the practical well-meaning self-confident man was taken completely aback when the slender girl before him quietly but firmly declined the honor of becoming his wife. For a moment, the world seemed to stand still. He could scarcely believe that he had understood her words aright.

"But, Miss Barbara," he pleaded, "you cannot have considered the matter in all its bearings—your home—your mother and sister—"

"Oh, hush, please," she said, hastily, with an imploring gesture. "Indeed, I have thought of everything, and I cannot do any differently," and the brave brown eyes looked straight into his, with an earnest entreaty for him to spare her. She knew only too well all the points of the situation.

But John Hammond was not to be silenced very easily. He drew his chair nearer to hers and leaned forward, fixing his keen eyes on her. Never before had she looked so sweet and lovely to him, as she sat there trembling a little, yet struggling proudly with herself to appear composed. His mood softened, and he began another train of argument.

"Barbara, I do not want you to think about the business arrangement. Of course, that is a secondary consideration. I want you to think only of the love and protection I can give you. You must have known that I have long admired you, and now I only ask that—"



"I am so sorry, Mr. Hammond, but I cannot let you go on. It is all useless, and will only give you pain. I feel very grateful for your kindness to us, and shall always esteem you as my dear father's friend, and mine also, if you will let me; but any other relationship between us is utterly impossible." She rose, walked to the low mantel, and rearranged some of the ornaments.

"But why should it be utterly impossible?" he asked, following her with his eyes. "I should like to know your objections."

Her pale face flushed. Then, with an effort, she replied:

"It is because I do not love you, and I never can marry anyone whom I do not love with my whole heart."

"Ah, I see—you believe in a 'grande passion.'" And all traces of his softer mood vanished. He straightened himself in his chair. "Come, Barbara—those ideas will do very well for sentimental schoolgirls; but, for a sensible woman like yourself, they are absurd. Just look at the whole situation, the bare facts of the case. We all have to face realities sooner or later in this world, and, the earlier we learn to accept them, the better for us. Think what I can do for you and your family, before you foolishly put the possibility out of your reach. Your mother has given her consent, and, from certain hints your father dropped in his last sad days, I feel sure he would have approved also."

"Do you think it is kind to bring up these things?" cried Barbara, drawing her slight figure to its full height and turning on him with burning indignant eyes. "My father never, never would have wished me to marry against my will, whatever depended upon it. And, as for my mother and Mabel, I am ready to make any sacrifice for them but this, which is impossible. They have no right to ask it. Oh, Mr. Hammond, can't you understand? We must be true to ourselves, as well as to others. There are sins against the conscience which everyone can understand; but there are sins against the heart also. No, no; you may call it romantic and sentimental, or whatever you please, but these are the 'facts of the situation' to me; and I dare not go against what I feel in my inmost soul to be true and right."

John Hammond was touched, although he could not appreciate her feelings as a finer nature would have done; they seemed decidedly overstrained. However, they had the effect of making him realize that it would be useless to urge his suit any longer. He felt disappointed,

and his life was not accustomed to such experiences.

After a few moments of sullen silence, he rose, saying coldly:

"I hope, Miss Barbara, you realize fully what you are throwing away. It would be a pity if you were to come to your senses too late."

"I shall never regret anything, Mr. Hammond, but the pain I have caused you," Barbara answered, in a low voice.

He walked back and forth a few times, nervously gnawing his gray mustache. Finally, he paused in front of her.

"I will come again, after you have had a chance to talk it over with your mother—after you have had time to consider my offer calmly in all its important aspects, as regards the other members of your family as well as yourself. I shall come one week from to-day, for my final answer."

"I can never make it any different from the one I have given you to-day—" Barbara began to say; but, before she had finished her sentence, he had bowed politely and left the house.

The week that followed was a hard one for the poor girl. Sometimes, it seemed as if her strength must give way before the overwhelming torrent of tears, reproaches, arguments, and selfish supplications poured forth by her mother and sister.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she said, one night. "you cannot know what you ask of me, or you would not—" And then she broke down utterly.

"My child," and Mrs. Moreland's voice was very calm and meant to be convincing. "I only ask of you what is for your good. It is the most natural and the most sensible thing, anyone would say who knew all the circumstances. Mr. Hammond will make a very kind indulgent husband, and you would be far happier, as his wife, than you will struggling to earn your own living in some narrow pinched way. You have been brought up in luxury, and haven't the faintest idea what it means to be actually poor."

"I wish I had been the one," said pretty worldly Mabel. "He would have met with better success if he had tried for me."

They were sitting by the library-fire, after dinner. There seemed to be, in these days, only one topic of conversation.

"I have thought, sometimes," Mrs. Moreland continued, "that possibly you may have imagined yourself in love with Stuart Turner, your penniless young artist-friend. But I cannot believe you would let such a foolish fancy weigh against a substantial offer like Mr. Hammond's."

Barbara started as if she had received an

electric shock—and then her heart stood still. She sat gazing into the fire, stunned and motionless. By-and-by, among the burning coals, definite pictures took shape. She saw herself dancing with Stuart Turner, at one of Mrs. Danforth's elegant balls. She had on her lovely blue silk and white lace dress for the first time, and wore pink roses at her waist. After the dance, they walked through the brilliant rooms, and then went into the conservatory, to rest and talk. There, among the flowers, he told her he was going to Europe, to lead a Bohemian artist's life for the next few years, study the old masters, and see if he could not paint something worth while. He took both her little hands in his as he said, looking straight into her eyes:

"Will you promise not to forget me, Barbara—though I should not see you again for years?"

And she, with her eyes held captive by his, had answered in a voice wholly new to herself, yet scarcely above a whisper:

"I promise never to forget you, Stuart."

That was all. And it was two years ago that it happened. She had not received one word from him during that time—but she had not forgotten. Her mother surely did a very unwise thing for her own side of the case, to call forth those vivid pictures in the fire-glow. They brought comfort and strength to Barbara's sorely-tried heart, as nothing else could have done just then. She had not thought of seeking help in his memory before this. Ah, what help it was! Now she could think and act. She would not break down again. She got up presently, saying she was too tired to talk any more, and went upstairs to her room.

A new idea had seized her. Other memories had followed close. Her happy summer at Jefferson, after that winter, all came back to her, and on her way upstairs these words kept ringing in her ears:

"If the day should ever come when you stand in need of a friend, my child, I hope you won't forget old Kingsley Jacobs."

Upon the hotel piazza, facing the grand restful mountains standing in the moonlight, he had said the words the night before she came away. She could see just how he looked, sitting in his wheeled chair, wrapped in his ulster. An accident had happened to him in his childhood, which crippled him for life. A queer crabbed cross-grained man was what the majority of people found him in his old age, but once in a while someone would succeed in getting below the crust of moroseness, to find a deep well of lovingkindness and gentleness. Barbara, with her earnest truthful nature and sweet winning

ways, was one of the few who found instinctively the key to his higher self, and there sprang up between them, that summer, one of those rare true friendships which are as improving as heart-satisfying, in which great difference in age does not matter, the congeniality depending on inner rather than outward conditions.

To this friend, she decided to turn in her trouble. For the first time in weeks, she slept soundly. The next morning, she quietly told her mother that she was going to Orange, New Jersey, to see Mr. Jacobs. That she meant to try and get pupils there, something to do by which she could support herself. She urged her mother to accept their Uncle John's generous offer of a home, which he had extended to them when first he knew the shape his brother-in-law had left his affairs. If only her mother and Mabel would go to him till she found out what she could do. Then perhaps in a year or two they might make a home together somewhere.

Mrs. Moreland was struck dumb with amazement at her daughter's plans.

"Barbara, you are crazy," she shrieked, when she found her voice, and would not listen to anything she proposed.

Poor Barbara did what packing was necessary, left a short decisive note for Mr. Hammond, who was to come the next day for his final answer, and departed with a sad but brave heart.

To old Mr. Jacobs, her coming was like a ray of sunshine let in on his gloomy life. He lived alone in a large stone mansion, cared for by a faithful old housekeeper and devoted servants. He had no near relatives left, and he opened his heart and his doors to the brave beautiful girl who would not make a mercenary marriage. It gratified him beyond measure that she had chosen out of all the world to turn to him. If she must try her wings a little, he would aid her plan; but secretly he determined not to part with her for any length of time. So, to please her, he found her a home with two elderly ladies who kept a small boarding-house in a pleasant street. Before long, she obtained a few music-pupils, and also a position as organist at a little church close by, where she had taken a Sunday-school class. It had never been able to pay for music before, but she was waited on by a committee who stated that a fund had been raised, and they would like to engage her services at a salary of four hundred dollars a year. They did not tell her that the sole contributor to the fund was Mr. Kingsley Jacobs—and Barbara never knew.

Every day, she spent an hour or two with her kind benefactor, reading to him, and trying in

various ways to make his life brighter and less lonely. She wrote a long joyful letter home after she was fairly into her work, but it was six weeks before she received a reply. One came at last—a brief cold note informing her of Mabel's approaching marriage to Mr. Hammond.

A year passed quickly, full of usefulness and happy content for Barbara. But Mr. Jacobs was growing feeble, and he depended more and more on this bright young life which had become closely entwined with his. He could do without her no longer. She must come and comfort his few remaining years. So Barbara gave up her teaching and went to live at the great stone house, and became a loving devoted daughter to the old man who had never been blessed with wife or child.

Two years more elapsed, when, one day, a tall young man, with blonde hair and mustache and a head set proudly on his square shoulders, strode up to Mr. Jacobs's door and asked for Miss Moreland. He was shown into the parlor, and then a very strange thing happened: Barbara came running downstairs, with shining eyes and trembling lips, hesitated an instant on the threshold, then rushed straight into the outstretched arms of the visitor, whose face and eyes were eloquent with love's longing.

Stuart Turner had great difficulty in reconciling Mr. Jacobs to his wishes. Barbara had become so dear to the invalid, he could scarcely bear to have her out of his sight. And did this young jacknapes expect he was going to give her up for the asking? Why didn't he come

for her before? Why did he stay over there in Europe, daubing pictures, when the poor child was turned out of her home? And so he went on. But gradually his wrath subsided and he could listen to the lover's story. After a long talk, they came to an understanding, and matters were arranged in this wise:

The young artist was to marry Kingsley Jacobs's adopted daughter and heiress. He was to open a studio in New York, but the pair were to live at the great house in Orange; and Barbara was never to be separated from the kind old man, the light of whose life she had become.

"I should hardly have dared to come, darling, if I had known you were an heiress," said Stuart, when everything was happily settled and he and Barbara were talking over together all that they had lived in the years that had passed since the night they parted, and she promised not to forget him.

"You know, it was your wealth and position that kept me back in the first place. I couldn't face your father and ask for you, in my poverty; so I had to go without a word. But I determined, as soon as I could scrape together ten thousand dollars, to take the next steamer home. And now here you are, richer than ever. I suppose, really, I ought to have gone right back to Europe as soon as I heard of it." And he smiled down into her eyes.

"Oh, Stuart! and you would have left me to mourn for you all my days?"

The only answer she received was a shower of kisses upon her upturned face.

## FIRST LOVE.

BY GERTIE V. GUERNSEY.

It has come to all of us once,  
Sometime in our beautiful youth—  
So subtle and sweet and fine,  
So wonderfully divine,  
It is more like a dream than truth.

And it passes away like a dream,  
Like a bow from the clouds of morn,  
Like a rose from the vernal bough,  
And all that is left to us now  
Is the noontide heat and the thorn.

Yet still we keep in our hearts  
A thought of the things that are past—  
So strange that they seem unreal,  
So pure that they grow ideal—  
And we almost doubt them at last.

To think that the touch of a hand  
Or accents tender and low  
Have thrilled with a rapture above

All joy that a later love  
In its fullness could bestow I

Ofttimes, in the poet's lay  
Or the singer's plaintive tone  
Is a spell that conjures the ghost  
Of these things that we loved the most  
And makes them again our own.

And tears come into our eyes  
For the sweetness we did not win.  
Ah, why should the things most pure  
Be the things that seldom endure  
In this world of trouble and sin?

And well for the favored few  
Who have won and kept their own.  
The prize of a love like this:  
For theirs is the truest bliss  
That the world has ever known.